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## "Giants Have Trampled the Earth": Colonialism and the English Tale in Samuel Selvon's *Turn Again Tiger*

Giants have trampled the earth and asked no pardon—  
Well, nor did I. He took our family's gold.  
I stole it back and saw the giant die.

—Judith Wright, "The Beanstalk, Meditated Later"

Folk narrative has played a vital role in the long, slow process of intellectual decolonization that has taken place in the colonies and former colonies of the British Empire. In the early days of this struggle, writers and artists of the negritude movement, such as Aimé Césaire, sought, in the teeth of sustained depreciation of African traditions by Europeans, to affirm that inheritance by publishing African-influenced folktales collected from Martiniquan sources (Césaire and Méné 7–10). In Nigeria the novelists Chinua Achebe and Amos Tutuola used the folklore of, respectively, the Igbo and the Yoruba to demonstrate that, in Achebe's words, "African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty" (8). And in the Caribbean, as a final but by no means exhaustive example, writers such as Kamau Brathwaite argued that Creolized Caribbean identities need to draw strength from their shared rooting in the partially erased "African aspect" of the "New World/Caribbean heritage" (*History* 8, 13). In all of these instances folklore fulfills a cultural function, as it has done since the earliest calls to collect national folk-narrative materials from Johann Gottfried Herder and his followers, the Brothers Grimm: it offers a grounding for efforts to establish the unity and durability of the national collective or the ethnic unit in the face of threats to that collective from external forces.

Naturally, efforts at cultural revival in Africa and the Caribbean have focused predominantly upon the revaluation of non-European folk-narrative

materials. The recovery of the extensively denigrated traditions of enslaved and colonized peoples, as Brathwaite has argued, is one of the key moves necessary in efforts to unify these damaged cultures and to re-root them in history and tradition. By contrast, popular British continuities in the Caribbean are not generally regarded as the politically important or nationally enabling continuities so far as cultural self-definition and intellectual decolonization are concerned. On the contrary, popular British continuities in the Caribbean are frequently seen as an active impediment to national self-definition, because they have worked in tandem with canonical British literary works to promote the dignity and seriousness of the British tradition while simultaneously erasing knowledge of alternative African and local traditions. In a well-known passage from his influential pamphlet *The History of the Voice*, for instance, Brathwaite mentions British folk traditions alongside canonical British literary monuments in his account of how the Caribbean education system in the colonial era used the English language and the English heritage as a buttress for imperial power. Shakespeare, George Eliot, and Jane Austen, he asserts, all had a role to play in British colonial efforts to "maintain the language of the conquistador," but equally, traditional narratives, such as tales of "Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood" or popular fictions of English history and English heroism, have ensured that "[p]aradoxically, in the Caribbean (as in many other 'cultural disaster' areas), the people educated in this system came to know more, even today, about English kings and queens than they do about [their] own national heroes, [their] own slave rebels, the people who helped to build and to destroy [their] society" (8). In the Caribbean, Brathwaite laments, "we are more excited by their literary models, by the concept of, say, Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood than we are by Nanny of the Maroons, a name some of us didn't even know until a few years ago" (8). In a similar vein, in his curse poem "Hex," Brathwaite contends that popular traditions such as the story of King Alfred burning the cakes or the song of the Men of Harlech, in conjunction with the poems of Keats or Milton, have played a significant role in forcing schoolchildren to forget their own primary cultural attachments and to define themselves by reference to external models. "[T]he chillren lock-way in their factories of schools," he writes

... eat paper. they spit out half-  
chewed words. they burn king alfreds cakes  
but cannot help w/the housework

~~~~~

they learn to smile w/keats & milton  
but forget lizzie and joe



they sing men of harlech  
but know nothing of the men who march

from congo rock

(*Ancestors* 78)

Significantly, all three of the British traditions that Brathwaite cites in these fragments of commentary are narratives about resistance to colonizing powers. Robin Hood is a legend that, in most of its variant manifestations, centers on the resistance of a band of culturally marginalized outlaws to an overweening, dominant power; King Alfred, in the tale of the burned cakes, is the leader of an embattled national force, staging a bold resistance war against the invading Danes; and the song of the Men of Harlech is about the glorious but doomed resistance of a Welsh insurgency to the might of English imperialism in its first expansionist stage.<sup>1</sup> Brathwaite's point, however, is that even though they may be about resistance to dominant power, such legendary histories lack transformative political force in Jamaica and the Caribbean, because they come in the vanguard of colonialism and have been used consistently to reinforce colonialist authority. Far more useful for the revaluation of a confident and assertive shared Caribbean identity would be a knowledge of African traditions or native Caribbean traditions, such as the one that Brathwaite cites as an alternative to tales of Robin Hood: the semilegendary story of Nanny of the Maroons, who led an army of escaped slaves and freedom fighters against British colonial forces in the 1730s and who can, in turn, be traced, as a cult figure, back to the African Ohemmaa, or Queen Mother of the Akan people.<sup>2</sup>

This argument is consistent with Brathwaite's broader view of how cultural revaluation, and cultural resistance, needs to be effected in the Caribbean. For Brathwaite, it is the objective of Caribbean writers to "Calibanize" English and, in so doing, claim English as their own and find a way out of the imprisoning structures of colonial discourse (Mackey 15). By this, however, he does not mean that Caribbean writers should do what Caliban did in his "traditional" Shakespearean context and curse Prospero using the language that Prospero taught him. On the contrary, Brathwaite argues that modern Caribbean writers should seek to do what Caliban failed to do and try to find a route out of the imprisoning discourses that Prospero wove around him. "The traditional Caliban does not go far enough," Brathwaite told Nathan Mackey in an interview: "he's a would-be rebel" (Mackey 17). A successful Caliban, the kind of Caliban that Brathwaite strives to be in his own poetry, must find a position outside the language of Prospero and use that position as a secure basis from which to mount effective resistance to Prospero's magic. This route out, as Brathwaite

argues, is via Caliban's mother—the witch Sycorax—who is associated, for Brathwaite, with Africa and African continuities in the Caribbean. "Instead of Caliban revolting even against the language of Prospero," Brathwaite writes, he should really be "trying to hack his way back to the language of the forgotten, submerged mother, Sycorax" (Mackey 16). "He doesn't have to be in a prison at all, as long as he recognises that he did have a mother and does have a mother and therefore in relocating her, rediscovering her, he is already free of anything that Prospero can spin round him" (16).

The implications for folk narrative are reasonably clear, and this demonstrates simultaneously why folk narrative becomes such an important field of contest in Brathwaite's thinking. An alternative tradition, a way outside the languages of Prospero, can be found in the oral inheritances from Africa, passed from generation to generation and preserved in folk song and folktale. The dominance of English folk narrative, especially since it survives predominantly in literary forms, is therefore particularly pernicious because it has cut off and replaced the oral routes back to Africa that are so vital for a recharting of Caribbean identity.

Brathwaite himself, of course, has been a prominent exponent and practitioner of Creolization in Caribbean writing. He does not argue for the rejection of British traditions, nor does he deny that traditions derived from Europe have a role to play in Caribbean arts. His point is, rather, that in the modern Caribbean artistic context it has become strategically necessary to emphasize African continuities in order to validate a sense of shared traditions across the diverse cultures of the region.<sup>3</sup> Other commentators, however, have not displayed the same subtlety as Brathwaite and have argued, in more absolute terms, that "the most culturally important traits in the Americas have an African origin" (Hill 93). These more radical applications of the Afrocentric argument almost invariably depend upon a nostalgic valorization of an African folk past that is largely mythical and have led to a divisive insistence upon the polarization of European and African traditions. "[I]n its stronger versions," as Stephen Howe demonstrates in his extensive analysis of Afrocentric positions, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Past and Imagined Homes*, these arguments promote "extreme intellectual and cultural separatism" and involve "belief in fundamentally distinct and internally homogenous 'African' ways of knowing and feeling about the world . . . which only members of the group can possibly understand" (1–2). Arguments of this nature have not, of course, gone uncontested in the Caribbean; quite the contrary, there have been vocal warnings against the emergence of a parochial tendency to resist cultural imperialism by isolating an "authentic" or "original" native folk tradition that defines itself through the exclusion of, and opposition to, traditions deemed alien or insufficiently "authentic." Caryl Phillips, for instance, while insisting that the people of the



African diaspora must remember their storytelling traditions in order to counteract the historical efforts of their colonial masters to "strip those of African origin of any connection to a remembered past," warns against the tendency among some of the "maroon" writers of the Caribbean to valorize African continuities at the expense of other "mediating contexts" in the region—Indian, Chinese, and indeed, European (221). Affirming modern Caribbean identity, for Phillips, must involve recognition of the importance of remembering the African past, but it also demands "more than the embracing of the 'amputated history' of Africa"; it requires a recognition of the "ambivalent relationship"—sometimes culturally disempowering, sometimes culturally enabling—that now holds between the Caribbean and Europe (226). Wilson Harris, in a similar vein, argued in his 1973 Edgar Mittelholzer lectures that since "English inheritances" form "part and parcel of the arts of the imagination" available to artists in the Caribbean and Guianas, they must also become part of the renaissance in Caribbean thought that will help it escape the imprisoning historical narrative of slavery, victimization, and domination (8). "I have no racial biases," Harris notes trenchantly (8).

One of the most prominent writers of the twentieth century to have reflected the vital cultural diversity of the Caribbean in literature is the Trinidadian novelist, playwright, and short story writer Samuel Selvon (1923–1994). Selvon's comic, episodic, and often philosophical novels characteristically focus on the experience of life on Trinidad and other Caribbean islands in the middle part of the twentieth century (*A Brighter Sun*, *Turn Again Tiger*), or upon the experience of the African and Caribbean migrant traveling to and settling in England or the United States in the same time period (*An Island Is a World*, *The Lonely Londoners*, *The Housing Lark*). Diverse as they are in setting and character, however, all of Selvon's novels draw freely upon popular folk traditions and folk speech by foregrounding uses of demotic language; by employing an episodic structure of prose "ballads"; and by making frequent use of proverbs, folktales, popular songs, and slogans. For this reason, Selvon has, on occasion, been corralled into playing the role of the Caribbean author who most consistently expresses the outlook of the Caribbean "folk." In one of the earliest and most influential literary critical comments on Selvon's fiction, for instance, his fellow novelist George Lamming identified him as one of the most important folk poets to be writing in the British Caribbean and celebrated him accordingly as a voice of the Caribbean peasantry. "Unlike the business man importing commodities," Lamming argued, West Indian novelists such as Selvon "did not look out across the sea to another source"; they "looked in and down at what had traditionally been ignored" (38–39). Selvon thus becomes, for Lamming, "essentially peasant"—he "never really left the land that once claimed [his] ancestors like trees" (45).<sup>4</sup>

While Lamming is indisputably correct to see Selvon as a writer who is strongly influenced by Caribbean folklore and folklife, however, it would be a mistake to assume on this basis that Selvon's fiction draws upon a narrow spectrum of tradition. Quite the contrary, Selvon's fiction is ablaze with the diverse cultural traditions that reflect both his own mixed inheritance as an Indian Trinidadian with Scottish ancestry and a broader cultural scene that, in Donald R. Hill's estimation of Caribbean folklore, "is wider than indigenous cultures of the continents from where it came" (6). In the novel *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* (1972), for instance, the title of which itself refers to a "native legend in Trinidad which says that those who eat the cascadura [a fish] will end their days in the island no matter where they wander" (Selvon, *Ways* 11), we see depicted a fertility dance that has "borrowed bits and pieces" from various cultures (107), we hear a set of stories and superstitions that derive ultimately from African sources (47-50), we hear "an Indian air" that accompanies a ritual cocoa dance (72), and we meet a character who likes to "think in parables and proverbs"—particularly, as it turns out, European parables and proverbs like the story of the goose that lays "a golden egg" (64). Likewise, in Selvon's novel of migration and diasporic settling, *The Housing Lark* (1965), we are treated to a rich blend of allusions to Scottish hymns, English historical folklore, English legends, Trinidadian proverbs, and Middle Eastern storytelling. In both of these texts, and in Selvon's other novels, too, European-derived traditions take their place alongside other traditions and work to express either Caribbean identity within the West Indies or Caribbean identity within European diasporas. Perhaps the most substantial use of European traditions in Selvon's oeuvre, however, comes in his 1958 novel, *Turn Again Tiger*, in which two English traditional tales, "Jack and the Beanstalk" and "Whittington and His Cat," play a significant structural and thematic role. It is, therefore, to this text and its two intertexts that this essay now turns in order to further explore the possible functions of English traditions in postcolonial Caribbean contexts. Its aim in so doing is not to offer any general account of how European (and English) traditions are always used in the region; such uses are necessarily broad. Rather, the intention of this essay is to demonstrate that it is possible for English traditions to be used in sophisticated ways in Caribbean writing that neither deny the history of oppression in which such stories are implicated nor reject them as narratives that can potentially play an affirmative role in the expression of an independent postcolonial Caribbean identity. In so doing, this essay seeks to contest the radical Afrocentric argument, cited above, that English traditions can never be meaningful in the Caribbean, because the past in which they are implicated is too monumental to be remodeled; it also seeks to establish that, far from being an irrelevance to Caribbean



cultural identity, some traditional English stories have in the course of time become an integral and constructive part of cultural life in the region.

It is not clear when the narrative of "Jack and the Beanstalk" was absorbed into black West Indian oral traditions. The story has been current in Britain since at least 1734, and it is conceivable that it migrated to Jamaica and the Caribbean at about this time, carried by slave traders and settlers who in turn communicated it to African slaves.<sup>5</sup> It is more probable, however, that it did not embed itself in local tradition until the colonial period that followed abolition in 1833 when, in Brathwaite's terms, "the blacks, 'getting education,' found themselves open to the influence of their white literate teachers" (*Folk Culture* 4). Prior to this date, Brathwaite argues, English folk traditions did not entwine with African folk traditions, because Europeans held themselves aloof from African slaves and Creole blacks "and so contributed very little to the texture of local customary and spiritual life beyond the framework of the Great House and the plantation" (4).<sup>6</sup> This speculation is given added reinforcement by the fact that the first oral version of the "Jack and the Beanstalk" story to be recorded in the West Indies—a variant collected by the American folklorist Martha Warren Beckwith in the summer of 1919 or the winter of 1921 from a young man named Clarence Tatham in Mandeville, Jamaica—seems to derive ultimately from the influential chapbook rendering of this story by Benjamin Tabart, which was not published until 1809, two years after the passage of the act that made the slave trade illegal in the British Empire. The most that can be said, therefore, is that this story arrived in the region sometime between 1809 and 1919 and that it is likely to have come either directly from a British source or indirectly via North America, where there is evidence to show that it had been absorbed into oral traditions by the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Tabart's version tells the story that, in its rudiments, is now well known.<sup>8</sup> A poverty-stricken but indolent boy, Jack, is sent by his mother to sell a cow in the next village. On route he meets a butcher who offers him a hatful of curious multicolored beans in exchange for the cow. Jack accepts this foolish bargain and returns home, only to have his exasperated mother kick the beans about the garden in a fit of fury. Overnight these beans take root and grow into a ladder that reaches up into the clouds. Jack then climbs the beanstalk ladder until he reaches a strange desertlike country, where he meets a fairy in the guise of an old woman. The woman tells him the sad history of his father, hitherto concealed from him by his mother. Jack's father, he learns, was a wealthy and generous man; but a treacherous giant, now living in the land at the top of the beanstalk, robbed him of his wealth and murdered him. Armed with this knowledge, Jack proceeds along a road until he comes to a "large mansion"



where he encounters a woman who tells him that her husband is "a large and powerful giant" who will kill and eat Jack if he finds him there (Opie and Opie 219). Heedless of this warning, Jack begs his way into the house and is hidden in an oven by the giant's wife when the giant returns home. Thus concealed, he sees the giant telling his magic hen to lay golden eggs, and when the giant falls asleep Jack creeps out of his hiding place, steals (or arguably reclaims) the hen, and flees back down the beanstalk. Two further trips up the beanstalk follow. On his second trip Jack manages to seize the giant's bags of gold and silver, and on the third he makes away with a magic harp. The harp, however, which is also a fairy, calls for its master while Jack is carrying it away, and the giant wakes and pursues Jack down the beanstalk. During his descent, Jack calls for a hatchet and, once back on terra firma, fells the beanstalk, sending the giant tumbling to his death. Jack and his mother then live on in peace.

Clarence Tatham's Jamaican version of this story offers a highly telescoped rendering of this same plot. Transcribed by Beckwith "as nearly as possible" (xi), it reads, in full, as follows:

"Jack and the Bean-stalk"

Jack's father died an' leave he an' his mother. And all them money finish an' they didn't have more than one cow leave. An' the mother gave him to go to the market an' sell it. When he catch part of the way, he swap it for a cap of bean.

When he get home, the mother get annoyed and t'row away the bean, so he get dread if the mother beat him. He went away an' sat by the roadside, an' he saw an old lady coming. 'he beg him something. 'he show him a house on a high hill, an' him tol' him de man live up dere is de man rob all him fader riches an' he mus' go to him an' he get somet'ing. An' so he went home back.

An' so in de morning, he see one of de bean-tree grow a large tree outside de window, an' 'tretch forth over de giant house; an' he went up till he reach to de giant house. An' when he go, de giant was not at home an' he ax de giant wife to put him up an' give him something to eat. De wife tell him she will give him something to eat, but she can't put him up, for anywhere him put him de giant will find him when him come home. He said to de giant wife him must tek a chance. De wife put him into a barrel. When de giant come home, de giant smelled him. He ax him wife where him get fresh blood. So she told him she have a little somet'ing to make a pudding for him tomorrow. Said 'he mus' bring it. Said no, better to have fresh pudding tomorrow than to have it tonight. After de giant finish his dinner, started to count

his money. He fall asleep on de table, an' Jack went down take de bag of money an' went away to his house. He climb on de bean-tree right outside his window an' went home back an' gave his mother the money. (Beckwith 149)

Absent in this abbreviated version of the story are the two other trips that Jack makes up the beanstalk to collect the hen that lays the golden eggs and the magic harp as well as the killing of the giant by the severing of the beanstalk. Present is the broad opening scenario concerning the beans, Jack's dealings with the giant's wife, his theft from the giant, and, crucially, his encounter with the old woman, which seems to have been an innovation introduced by Tabart but absent in the later version popularized by Joseph Jacobs in his 1890 volume, *English Fairy Tales*. Newly added in the Jamaican variant of this story is the fact that Jack meets the old lady on his home ground, not in the land at the top of the beanstalk, and the fact that the house of the giant appears not to be in the sky at all, but high on a hill.

Read in the Jamaican context, in light of recent colonial history the choices that have been made in the transformation of this tale seem significant. In the first place, the diminishment of the supernatural element—through the apparent rationalization of the beanstalk, and through the removal of the hen that lays the golden eggs and the magic harp—suggests that this is a story that is more concerned with negotiating a familiar situation than with fantasizing about the incredible. What concerns the peasant protagonists of this tale is the felt poverty of the opening scenario and a clear-sighted perception of the minimal that needs to be accomplished to liquidate that poverty, not a desire to be transported out of the known world to a place beyond the clouds. In the second place, the emphasis on, and the comparative realism of, the old lady's revelation that "de man live up dere is de man rob all [Jack's] fader riches" suggests an indirect reflection upon colonial relations and an implicit willingness to countenance—if only on the symbolic plain—subversive acts of resistance to over-mighty and illegitimate occupiers of the land. This possibility may also explain why the giant is taken out of the sky and put on the ground. This monster is not a supernatural being, separated from the land, but a being that is established on the land, in a visually imposing "house on a high hill" that might easily call to mind the visually imposing domains of the white landowners on the plantation estates.

The equation of the giant with colonial power implicit in this oral version of the story is made much more overt in literary uses of giant-killer fictions from the Caribbean. For instance, Patrick Chamoiseau, in his veiled Creole giant-killer story, "Ti-Jean Horizon," identifies the figure in the giant's role explicitly as a plantation-owning French slave driver, while the intrepid Jack-like

trickster Ti-Jean is identified with the African slaves (91–100). Likewise, in the giant-killer story relayed by the storytelling character More Lazy in Selvon's *Turn Again Tiger*, the giant is associated with American neo-imperial power in the Caribbean, while the character in the role of Jack—More Lazy himself—symbolizes indigenous Caribbean resistance. Very different colonial situations are being dealt with in each case: twentieth-century American neo-imperialism on one hand, eighteenth-century French colonialism on the other. Nevertheless, the ease with which this story can be adapted to address the concerns of the dispossessed in diverse contexts testifies to the fact that its story pattern is one that carries particular force in situations of colonial conflict.

More Lazy's narration occurs in the course of a dialogue between several characters, all of whom have come to visit him under his salmon tree in the hope of hearing one of the "stories which he had picked up on his travels" (Selvon, *Turn Again* 124), for which he is justly famed. It concerns a giant, such as "it uses to have . . . long ago, in story books" (125), who comes to the town of Five Rivers from America carrying a screaming woman in his hands. This giant threatens to wreak great destruction on the island, casually blowing down houses with the wind from his mouth whenever he laughs, and generally fostering misery amongst the local populace (126). While most of the citizenry "make races" (126) to get away from the giant, however, More Lazy, in the character of hero, stands his ground. This makes the giant so frightened that he drops the captive girl, who is caught in midair by the agile hero. More Lazy then defeats the giant by throwing a "tin of pitchoil" under his feet and setting light to it (126–27). His reward for this bravery is to receive the attentions of the woman he has rescued, and the tale concludes with the tantalizing suggestion that he gets to "treat she tough"—even tougher, we are told, than Humphrey Bogart treats his women (127).

According to Roydon Salick, in his critical study of Samuel Selvon's work, *More Lazy* represents "the indigenous Caribbean imagination, naturalized and localized" (41). He is, Salick writes, "the source and stuff of orality" and, as such, is designed to operate as the symbolic alternative to the "foreign imaginations" of writers such as "Aristotle, Plato, Shakespeare, and Omar Khayam," whose works the novel's protagonist, Tiger, in a highly charged scene, has been "driven to destroy" (41). Salick's first observations are indisputable. More Lazy does indeed represent an "indigenous" imagination, and his stories also represent the source and stuff of orality. Salick's final point, however, evades the fact that the story More Lazy tells ("picked up on his travels") is clearly one that is heavily influenced by "foreign imaginations." What Tiger learns from listening to More Lazy's stories, moreover, is not that he can successfully escape "foreign imaginations" by burning his books and retreating to indigenous orality, but, on the contrary, that it is impossible to fully escape from foreign influences in



the Caribbean, because those influences are not just in books, but in the local cultural traditions too. This is made plain in More Lazy's narration by the fact that his story, though now a Caribbean fiction, has been shaped by two resources that must ultimately be ascribed to foreign imaginations. In the first place, as More Lazy's interlocutors observe, the story owes much to American film: to the story of *King Kong* (1933), in which a giant gorilla is seen carrying a struggling woman in its hands. It is also, as Sandra Pouchet Paquet notes in her introduction to the 1979 edition of *Turn Again Tiger*, recognizably related to the European narrative tradition of Jack the Giant Killer—with More Lazy in the enabling role of Jack (Paquet 202).

For Paquet, this identifies More Lazy's story as one that is designed predominantly as a revisionist critique of the American and European source fictions. More Lazy, she implies, takes revenge on the source narratives, and how they have positioned cultural others, by inverting the power relationship implicit in these narratives. A "black man" turns himself into "the mythical Jack the Giant Killer," conventionally associated with English power and English intrepidity, while a "giant black ape" from the tropics, gunned down in the film by all-American heroes, is transmogrified into "a giant white American male" assailed by a plucky Caribbean trickster (202–03). In both cases, for Paquet, what is intended is a satire of the source narratives. "In his dream fantasy," she writes, "More Lazy asserts his superior maleness by fashioning the American giant into a rocket; he reverses the phallic image of superior fire power, and takes the white woman as his prize" (203).

It is certainly true to say that Selvon here intends a satirical reflection on *King Kong*, which reflects the deep anxieties about race and racial infestation that were current in the United States in the 1930s. The uses that are being made of "Jack the Giant Killer," however, seem more complex. On the one hand, it is true that More Lazy satirizes the white supremacism implicit in some tellings of the Jack tales. At one and the same time, however, it is also apparent that More Lazy is not using the story solely as a butt of his satire, but also as a vehicle for satire—as a fiction that is empowering *in its own right* and that can, without any need for subversive reinscription, be used as a potent tool for making satirical comment on American and British imperialist activities. When the giant is used as a thinly veiled cipher for a wayward American power that strides with ease over the ocean to plant its foot on Caribbean islands, for instance, or when its blundering but casual destruction of a Caribbean island becomes a snide comment upon the impact that American neo-imperialism has had upon the region, More Lazy is not engaged in a revisionist critique of the Jack narrative; he is making a contemporary homage to it that recognizes its usefulness in modern colonial contexts.

The actual "resistance" effected by More Lazy's narrative, of course, should not be overemphasized. More Lazy is not, ultimately, concerned with political

critique, but with self-aggrandizement, and his story does not point listeners in the direction of activism, but in the direction of soggy pornographic fantasy and idle escapism. This, according to Patrick Chamoiseau, is characteristic of all such trickster revenge narratives. "These stories," he observes, "contain no 'revolutionary' message, and their remedies for misfortune are not collective ones. The hero is alone, and selfishly preoccupied with saving his own skin" (xiii).<sup>9</sup> By the same token, however, as Chamoiseau goes on to assert, such stories may also be seen to fulfill what Lewis Seifert describes as "a paradoxical, if not contradictory strategy" (Seifert 220): they embody "a system of counter-values, or a counterculture, that reveals itself as both powerless to achieve complete freedom and fiercely determined to strive for it nonetheless" (Chamoiseau xiii). Narratives such as those spoken by More Lazy, thus, though they may remain ineffective when it comes to practical action, are important statements of intent when it comes to a spirited and dignified refusal to be a passive subject in the face of overbearing power.

This dimension of More Lazy's use of the giant-killer narrative becomes more obvious when we notice that the giant-killer narrative is not confined to More Lazy's inset story but is also replayed in the life story of the novel's protagonist, Tiger. For Tiger, too, it becomes apparent, is a giant killer of sorts; only in his case giant slaying is not a figment of an ineffectual fantasy but a symbolic act of self-empowerment that helps him to renegotiate his relationship with the authorities of the past and move forward into a more independent future.

Tiger, in brief, is a young Indian Trinidadian man who has consistently struggled against unpromising social and economic prospects to make himself into a figure of some learning and some social standing. At the start of *Turn Again Tiger*, the second of two novels devoted to the Tiger character, he is a happily married gardener, with a child, his own house, and a secure social place in the town of Barataria. Tiger, however, is not fully satisfied with his progress, and though he had vowed never to work in the cane fields at the end of the earlier novel, *A Brighter Sun* (1952), believing the cane is representative of the "destiny of his father, and his father's father" (5), he accepts a commission, for motives that remain obscure to him, to work as bookkeeper for his father, who is managing an experimental cane plantation in the region in which Tiger had spent his early years, Chaguanas. At first, Tiger believes he is, in this posting, answerable only to his father. Then he meets a man from the hills, Soylo, who tells him that "about two miles" from the cane field "it have a nice house" owned by "a white man who living there . . . from England" (34). This English man, Soylo suggests, is the person who is really "in charge of the cane in [the] valley" (34).



Tiger at first affects to disbelieve Soylo. Eventually, however, he decides to visit the house and makes the journey "up a narrow path at the side of the cane, rising higher with each step until after seven minutes he was looking down on Five Rivers" (57). This path takes him to the top of the hills surrounding the valley, and there he finds "the house, a painted, city-looking house, sitting down firmly on the earth" (58). He approaches this house and peeps inside, "a little scared" (59), but finding nobody home he walks down to the river behind the house. There he sees a white woman bathing naked in the river, and suddenly reminded of countless childhood warnings to "keep off the white man's land" (62), he flees in terror.

The next payday he discovers that the house belongs to Mr. Robinson, "a big man, going to fat" (74), who is indeed the supervisor, and that the woman in the river was his wife, Doreen. He resolves to keep his distance from both of them, but at length he learns that Robinson wants "a man up at the house to help around the place" (112), and he decides to go back a second time. At the house he is met at the door by Doreen, since Robinson is away on business, and she puts him to work in the garden. Under the pressure of this debasement, which Tiger seems half willingly to have embraced, Tiger's behavior becomes more and more erratic and his philosophical investigations of his own identity increasingly urgent. The mounting tension, however, is suddenly dispersed when Tiger and Doreen engage in a violent but consenting sexual act by the river, during which Tiger seems unsure whether he is having sex with Doreen or waging an aggressive war of conquest against "the force that was pulling him down against itself" (177). Thereafter, Tiger believes he has overcome something he has been wrestling with, and by the conclusion of the novel he is able to think about Robinson and Doreen dispassionately:

He would have been content to keep his life entirely apart from theirs, and in fact he had succeeded with Robinson. Where they went, what they did, how they thought—he shrugged at the cane in front of him, felled it and reached for another. True, his life had impinged on hers, but only for one purpose. There was no pleasure in the memory for him . . . afterwards he had shrugged like a snake, changing skins. No triumph, no satisfaction. . . . Just relief, as if he had walked through fire and come out burned a little, but still very much alive. (218)

This strand of the narrative is clearly concerned with exploring Tiger's confrontation with the legacy of British colonialism. What is intriguing, however, is that Tiger's story, to a significant degree, echoes the narrative of "Jack and the Beanstalk." Tiger, like Jack, is alerted by a sympathetic but slightly mysterious figure to the existence of a distant house that is occupied by a



looming presence—in this instance the white overseer, Robinson, who symbolizes the oppression of his “father and his father’s father” and whose giant-like authority Tiger has been striving to overthrow (“Over here some of we still feel white people is God, and that is a hard thing to kill” [191]). Like Jack, Tiger then climbs a hill to the house “rising higher with each step,” as if he were climbing on the cane itself (significantly, an experimental plant that modern agricultural experiments are endeavoring to make grow taller). At the house, Tiger is then met by Robinson’s spouse, as Jack is met by the giant’s wife; and she, too, is responsible for inviting him into the domain and perhaps also for hiding him from Robinson. Following this invitation, Tiger then, like Jack, engages in a protracted struggle against the power structures that Robinson represents; and finally he defeats Robinson, as Jack defeats the giant, by stealing from him and by unmanning him—acts that are achieved, in Tiger’s case, simultaneously through his murderous sexual encounter with Doreen. The giant, in this version of the story, may not live at the end of a beanstalk, but no less than Jack, Tiger defeats a monstrous presence in this episode—and he does so in the same oedipal terms that the Jack story makes so prominent.

Readers at this point of the novel might also be reminded of the giant who is defeated in More Lazy’s earlier rendering of the giant-killer plot. In both cases an oppressive, looming presence is successfully dispatched, and in both cases the narratives conclude with the protagonist treating the female character (a former possession of the giant character) in a sexually rough manner. Even as Selvon makes apparent the connection between More Lazy’s fantasy of giant killing and Tiger’s symbolic assault upon power, however, he also foregrounds the significant differences between these two scenarios. More Lazy’s use of this story leads toward a dead end—to the reproduction of existing power structures and to the dissipation of rebellious impulses in escapism. By contrast, Tiger’s living of the story has a far more constructive outcome. Tiger is able, through his symbolic conquest of Robinson, to move on with his life, beyond colonial legacies; Tiger also becomes aware that the simple possession of what the white man has does not represent the attainment of a decolonized identity, which is why in Tiger’s story, unlike More Lazy’s, the desire to possess the white woman, and the system of gendered relations that this desire represents, has to be something that is overcome and left behind. These two distinctive uses of the story indicate that the value of the story as a narrative of resistance depends not upon what the story does but upon how it is used in specific contexts. In More Lazy’s hands, the tale of giant killing is a performance of dissent that has no measurable impact upon how the protagonists live their lives; in Selvon’s hands, however, the tale of giant killing, enacted by his protagonist Tiger, creates change and leaves Tiger, at the end of the novel, a more self-aware, more personally and politically independent character than he was at the start.

It is worth noting in this regard that "Jack and the Beanstalk" is not the only English-derived fiction that Selvon makes use of in this novel. A pattern of allusions to the story of "Whittington and His Cat" is also worked into the novel, as is indicated most overtly by the title *Turn Again Tiger*, which restyles the refrain that is sung to the English folk hero Dick Whittington by the Bow Bells as he stands on a hillside over London, contemplating his departure from the city:

Turn again, Whittington,  
Thrice Lord Mayor of London.<sup>10</sup>

As was the case with the allusion to the story of Jack, this reference appears casual but gains greater resonance in the context of the novel as a whole. The narrative of Whittington, for instance, is echoed again at the start of *Turn Again Tiger* when we find Tiger, at a crucial moment in his life, on a hillside above the town, suspended between possibilities, awaiting "a message . . . telling him what to do" (5). No message is forthcoming in Tiger's case (though it is perhaps fair to say that the land does "speak" to him). Nevertheless, he, like Whittington, chooses to return, and this act of returning constitutes a crucial stage in the rite-of-passage narrative that transforms him from the naïve and impoverished peasant we meet at the start of *A Brighter Sun* into a relatively wealthy man and a potential political leader of his town at the end of *Turn Again Tiger*.

In his use of both the Jack story and the Whittington story, there is a sense in which Selvon is "writing back" to his source narratives. Both fictions are representative of an English heritage that was imported into the Caribbean by Europeans. Both, moreover, offer narratives that can be, and have been, used to dramatize and even justify the imperial act. Dick, in the legend, prospers, and is commended for prospering, because he sends his cat overseas, where it makes a fortune on his behalf through international trade with distant territories. Jack, likewise, is given license to defeat the monstrous cultural others (represented by the giant), to steal their resources, and to occupy their territories in the name of England. As Brian Szumsky has argued:

The basic materials of a tale like "Jack and the Beanstalk," which is predominantly a product of "imperial storytellers," are ripe with colonial imagery and language. . . . Tabart's version describes the land at the top of the beanstalk as a "strange country" . . . Jacobs, while omitting the desert and new land images, implies geographic separation . . . [and] [i]mportantly, the characterisation of the giant is a colonial representation of the "other" as a barbaric and morally objectionable presence which needs to be civilised or eliminated. (21–22)



Fictions such as this, as Szumsky goes on to argue, were engaged in a jingoistic project to define an English identity for the imperial age: they offered appropriate "capitalist-colonial" morals to the young late-Victorian readers of collections such as Jacobs's *English Fairy Tales* who would one day become agents of empire themselves, required to preserve English trading interests overseas and to defend English territories at the risk of their own lives (Szumsky 19).

In light of this set of narrative associations, it is unsurprising to find that Selvon is transforming both the Dick Whittington and the Jack and the Beanstalk stories even as he reutilizes them. More Lazy's retelling of the giant-killer story, as we have seen, reverses the implicit racism in the depiction of the giant by making "the black man" into the "mythical Jack the Giant Killer" (Paquet 202). In his reworking of the Whittington story, likewise, Selvon reverses the direction of Whittington's quest. Where Whittington and (on his behalf) his cat chart a relentless imperial march outward—from the regions, to London, to the world—conquering in their wake, Tiger elects to return to the land and to his roots, thus offering up a more "recursive" model of "progress" that values not conquest but contemplation, and not "overcoming" but "reconnection." It is also significant that in the title "Turn Again Tiger," as in the novel, the archetypal English name "Whittington," spoken by the Bow Bells, is replaced by "Tiger," a name that, in spite of the fact that Selvon cites a real person for its source, conjures up the figure from African tradition who appears as a central character in the Anansi cycle of tales.<sup>11</sup> The replacement of "Whittington" by "Tiger" may be seen to enact a symbolic revenge on the English fiction, arguing for the primacy of—even the victory of—native Afro-Caribbean fictions over their English alternatives.<sup>12</sup>

Even as he is reworking and rewriting these fictions, however, it is clear that Selvon is simultaneously using elements of those traditions affirmatively, to reinforce his critique of imperialism and racism. "Jack and the Beanstalk" and "Whittington and His Cat" may have been used to serve imperialist ends in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but they are also associated with a tradition of popular storytelling that, like the tradition of storytelling represented by More Lazy in the novel, is suspicious of authority and fantasizes about turning the tables on the rich and powerful. Jack, in this alternative tradition, is not the plucky Englishman at war with the monstrous colonial other; he is the "little man," the downtrodden peasant, who takes a trickster's revenge on the landed aristocracy and who ultimately topples that authoritarian order in an oedipal act of assassination. Dick, likewise, is not only the successful English entrepreneur who enriches himself at the expense of foolish, comical Moors. He is also the impoverished outsider, the migrant from the regions, who comes, like Selvon's Lonely Londoners, to the capital to tackle vested interest and who is ultimately victorious by virtue of an innate cunning, repre-



sented by his cat. Read in this way these are not fictions that Selvon is resisting in *Turn Again Tiger*; they are fictions that he extrapolates and exploits. Tiger is a Whittington in his tenacious efforts to grow, to understand, and to control; likewise, he is a Jack in his determination to discover and confront the "giant" of the English colonial legacy.

These complex uses of English inheritances in *Turn Again Tiger* demonstrate that in at least one major work of postcolonial Caribbean literature, English traditional tales operate as neither culturally limiting fictions nor culturally enabling fictions, but as narratives that, depending on use and context, can fulfill diverse roles. To some extent it remains the case that Selvon incorporates references to this tradition with a negative objective in view: he is interested in English traditions because he seeks to dethrone, travesty, and debunk them. But at the same time as Selvon adopts an irreverent and carnivalesque attitude to his English sources, he seeks simultaneously to exploit the antiauthoritarian elements in these sources for his own ends and so effectively extends and perpetuates them as viable traditions in their own right. This is because Selvon's fiction recognizes a double function in the European folk-narrative traditions it draws upon. On the one hand, it treats these narrative traditions as representative of a monumental heritage that, at best, has excluded Caribbean voices and must be demystified and deconstructed in Caribbean writing. At the same time, however, it also recognizes that these traditions reflect a culture of narrative dissent in which disempowered social groupings have sought, historically, in symbolic terms to challenge those with power. Narratives like "Jack and the Beanstalk" and "Whittington and His Cat" thus have two distinct and simultaneous aspects in Selvon's hands: they are stories that came, in the context of nineteenth-century English imperialism, to fulfill jingoistic and pro-British nationalistic functions that must be resisted and contested, but at the same time they connect with a strong tradition of imaginative dissent *from within Europe* that can be, and has been, easily adapted to address the injustices of colonial and postcolonial power politics. In this latter role, these narratives have an important affirmative role to play in the Caribbean imaginary—a role that, though they arrived in the Caribbean along with slavery and colonialism, makes them, in the postcolonial context, at least as useful in contesting myths of European authority as any other narrative inheritance in the region.

#### Notes

1. For an analysis of the colonial and anticolonial significances of the Robin Hood legend, see Knight and Barczewski.
2. See Brathwaite, *Wars* 15 and *History* 8. Nanny's connection to African traditions, according to Brathwaite, makes her the ideal "national hero" for the Caribbean, because she restores a "sense of an intimate, emotional connection with [the]

- past" by providing evidence of the survival of African "folk myths" from the period of slavery (Wars 3, 6).
3. A provocative trickster scholar in his own right, Brathwaite's views are notoriously difficult to pinpoint. For a lucid analysis of Brathwaite's simultaneous endorsement of Creolization and essentialism, see Bongie and Edmondson.
  4. Several commentators have since contested Lammings's problematic observations. F. Gordon Rohlehr, in his essay "The Folk in Caribbean Literature" (1972), identifies this statement, affirmatively, as "the beginning in West Indian literary criticism of a theory about the 'folk' and about the relation of West Indian writers to their roots," but argues that "like all beginnings, the statement was too absolute and too limiting, especially in the light of the complex little worlds which West Indian societies are." See Rohlehr 30–31.
  5. The story can be dated with certainty to 1734, because this is when it first appeared in print as a skit titled "The Story of Jack Spriggins and the Enchanted Bean" in a comic tract, *Round about Our Coal Fire; or, Christmas Entertainments*. As Neil Philip points out, however, "parody implies popularity," and we may confidently assume that the story was circulating long before this date (9).
  6. Several authorities are in agreement with Brathwaite. Helen Flowers, for instance, in the introduction to her *Classification of the Folktale of the West Indies*, argues that the African tale in the West Indies remained relatively undisturbed by other cultural influences because of "the comparative confinement of the blacks to their own society" (4).
  7. According to Ernest Baughman, the earliest version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" to be collected in North America appeared in Clifton Johnson's *What They Say in New England* in 1896. See the entry for AT 328B in Baughman, *Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America*.
  8. Tabart's chapbook text is available in Opie and Opie 214–26. For a history of the Jack tale, see their introduction, 211–13. See also Philip 7–10.
  9. The observation appears in Chamoiseau's introduction to his collection of stories *Strange Words*, published in the United States as *Creole Folktales*. This collection was originally published in France in 1988 as *Au temps de l'antan*, by Editions Hatier, Paris.
  10. The rhyme is variously rendered. This is taken from the version in Joseph Jacobs's *English Fairy Tales* of 1890, arguably the version that gave the story its twentieth-century form. See Jacobs 171.
  11. For Selvon's identification of Tiger as a "real name," see Fabre 69. Beckwith includes several "Tiger" tales in her *Jamaica Anansi Stories*. Tiger is invariably the object of Anansi's trickery.
  12. There is perhaps also a latent suggestion that the tame animal that works on Whittington's behalf in the English story has been transformed in Selvon's rewriting into a Tiger—a wild animal who, as his English proprietor discovers, is more difficult to control and much less obedient to English interests than the "cat" of the colonial fiction.

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